

Amble Urban District

ANNUAL REPORT OF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH FOR 1898.

GENTLEMEN.—In submitting my Annual Report for the past year, we have cause for congratulation at the comparatively healthy condition of the community and a low death-rate, considering that it is mostly a working class population. During the early months of the year the weather was exceptionally mild, and there was very little sickness. In the month of March a sudden change of temperature, with easterly winds, caused a rapid recurrence of Influenza, which continued very prevalent till the end of May. The epidemic was one of the most severe we have experienced in this district. The death rate rose in April, May, and in June, reaching the highest recorded during the year, in the latter month, viz., 24 per thousand.

A sudden change to warmer weather at the end of June, in July, and the early part of August; a period of the highest degree of healthiness, in my experience, in the district was recorded. The lowest death-rate was recorded in July when only one death occurred from cardiac disease. About the middle of August a severe epidemic of diarrhoea broke out in the district, due no doubt in some measure to the intense heat which then prevailed. This epidemic continued till the end of September, when the long continued drought gave way to more moist conditions in October. Although no deaths were directly attributed to diarrhoea, I have no doubt it in a great measure accounted for the high death rate of that month, which was the same as that of June, viz., 24 per thousand. No deaths with two exceptions are registered as directly due to either influenza or diarrhoea, but I have no doubt they had an indirect tendency in raising the mortality by weakening the constitution and rendering the debilitated more liable to contract intercurrent diseases to which they finally succumbed. During December a rather severe epidemic of measles manifested itself which was evidently an extension from the surrounding district as Amble was the last place affected by it. As a precautionary measure I recommended the closing of the schools before their usual holidays which seemed for a time to have beneficial results in checking the spread of the disease. The schools during the closed period were ordered to be all thoroughly disinfected and ventilated.

Death Rate.—The number of deaths registered in the district was 66 giving a death rate of 14.66 per thousand on an estimated population of 4,500. If however we estimate two deaths of persons not belonging to the district and two due to accidental causes we reduce the death rate to 13.77 per thousand which is eminently satisfactory considering that we have a working class population to deal with.

Infant Mortality.—Of the total 66 deaths we find rather a large proportion, viz., 23 of children under one year giving an infantile mortality of 4.11 per thousand. This is not so alarming as at first sight it may appear as a large number of these merely survived birth by minutes or hours. The causes for these deaths are varied and in some cases obscure. Of the remainder the deaths seem to be due to the usual infantile diseases. There are six deaths of children between the ages of one and five years, two of which were due to whooping cough which was prevalent among children in May and June, and two due to bronchitis, which may probably have been a sequelae of the above disease. Between the ages of five and sixty-five there are 19 deaths due to various causes, which are classified in the accompanying table of mortality. Eighteen deaths are registered of persons who exceeded the age of sixty-five, twelve of which exceeded seventy years, and two reached over the extreme age of eighty.

Zymotic Mortality.—Five deaths were registered as due to zymotic diseases, giving a death rate of 1.11 per thousand. Whooping cough, as before noted, accounted for two of these. A slight outbreak of scarlet fever occurred in that most unsatisfactory, from a sanitary point of view, block of buildings at the corner of Henderson Street and Leazes Street, known as the old fish yard. Vigorous precautionary measures were taken against its spread, and only a few isolated families were affected. Unfortunately, one death resulted. I have no doubt the condition of this yard before mentioned was in a great measure the cause of the outbreak. I might just mention in passing that more attention should be paid to this yard by the scavengers, so that the house and other refuse be removed at shorter intervals.

Enteric fever accounted for one death, the original cause of which seems very obscure, as there was no unsanitary condition existing in and about the house, and the water and milk supplies were above suspicion. The only explanation is that the germs must have been imbibed outside the district, or from drinking water from some polluted source. One death was registered as due to puerperal fever. In this instance no visible

unsanitary condition existed. There were no deaths due to any of the other infectious diseases, nor, to my knowledge, did any cases occur in the district.

Phthisis.—Five deaths from phthisis were registered during the year, giving a death rate from that cause of 1.11 per thousand. This is a much lower mortality than in the year immediately preceding. The bright sunshine and extreme dryness of the atmosphere have evidently had a beneficial effect on that disease.

Birth-rate.—The number of births registered during the year was 156, of which 80 were males and 76 females, giving a birth-rate of 34.66 per thousand, which shows a healthy natural increase of population.

Sanitary Improvements.—During the year many sanitary improvements have been carried out under the direction of your inspector, Mr Gibson. The sewers where defective have been lifted and relaid, and all cesspools in the district have been done away with. The laying of a branch sewer to Woodbine street has removed a long-standing grievance to the inhabitants of that street. Careful attention has been paid to the flushing of the sewers, providing manholes and ventilating shafts where required. The slaughter houses have been kept in a sanitary condition. The bakehouse, cow sheds, &c., have been duly reported on by Mr Gibson as being kept clean and tidy, as also the Aerated Water Manufactory. Complaints have been made to me about the remissness of the authority in the cleaning of ash-pits, etc. These should be attended to more frequently. I would recommend owners of property, who have not already done so, to adopt the box system in place of the large unsanitary ashpit which still exists. The box system is far the cleanest, and, I might say, most comfortable for the occupier, besides being more convenient for the scavenger.

Water Supply.—The water supply continues giving the greatest satisfaction, both as to quantity and quality. During the extreme drought of the past year not the slightest sign of a failing supply was noticed. In fact there is a supply sufficient, I understand, for three or four times the present population. Applications for the extension to various parts of the district, and even outside the district, are at present under consideration. An extension to the Hope Farm has been completed during the year.

Streets.—The streets and roads are receiving more attention, and the results are satisfactory. A more expeditious removal of street sweepings is desirable. A beginning has been made with the making of streets, under the Private Streets Improvement Act, where new houses have been built. It is to be hoped that rapid progress will be made with these in the coming year.

Requirements.—The Notification of Infectious Diseases Act is again recommended for your adoption. An infectious diseases hospital and mortuary have still to be built, although I have previously recommended the provision of same. Urinals have still to be ordered, although I have previously recommended you to provide them. The water supply is plentiful, and that cannot now be any excuse. Water troughs have still to be provided and placed in position. The filling up of that most unseemly place in front of the Central Hall still requires your attention. I might just mention that the Central Hall is very ill adapted for its purpose, as there are no water closets, which are essential to such public buildings. The Council should recommend the provision of same to the directors, so that the place may be made sanitary.

Milk Supply.—I made some suggestions as to milk supply in my last report, but no action has been taken thereon. The present method of supply is not satisfactory from a sanitary point of view, and some action should be taken. The periodical inspection of the cows and dairies should be insisted on, the former especially by a veterinary surgeon. This is a most important sanitary matter, as it is well known that tubercular disease may in this way be communicated to the human subject.

Disinfecter.—In previous years I have recommended the purchase of a disinfecter wherewith the clothing, etc., of persons in houses where an infectious disease has occurred may be disinfected. This is a sanitary necessity, and should be provided by the Council.

Houses.—A few new houses have been built during the year, the plans for which have been passed by the Council. These in every instance complied with the sanitary requirements of the district. As regards air space and offices, during the year I have from time to time made inspections, both independently and in company with Mr Gibson, and have got a number of lesser sanitary defects rectified by the owners of property, who in most instances were anxious to comply with any reasonable demand.

I thank the members individually for the courtesy extended to me during the year, and trust that in the coming year I may have a still more favourable report to present to you.—I am, your obedient servant,

W. SMYTH.

